

# THE BIBLICAL OLD TESTAMENT, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE CHALLENGES OF SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

The article looks at corruption in Nigeria from the lens of Christianity and the Old Testament. In the context of this article, corruption refers to any act of fraud, thievery, embezzlement, and nepotism that directly or indirectly robs citizens of satisfactory existence. The political, economic, educational, and religious circles are caught up in corrupt practices. An evaluation of the challenge reveals that corrupt practices in Nigeria have continued to thrive due to the lack of rebuke in the sermons of Christian religious leaders, the increased prosperity gospel, and the pressure of financial obligation on members by the clergy. The root causes of corruption in Nigeria are rooted in the activities of genuine Christians and religious leaders who serve as accomplices in the corrupt actions of their members in leadership positions. As part of recommendations, Churches and institutions should practise and preach integrity to their adherents.

**Keywords:** Old Testament, Christianity, Corruption, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Corruption is spreading like a wide fire in Nigeria the effect of which creates a major challenge to its national development. Corruption is the gain of money, financial resources, contract, employment, fame, status, and power through illegal and immoral practices such as bribery, fraud, abuse of office in both public and private institutions (Olusoga 1981:17). In Nigeria, corruption is found in the political, economic, educational, and even the religious environment. This is seen in increasing embezzlement of public and private funds, bribery, inflation of contracts, nepotism, hubris, narcissism, among others. The implications of these corrupt actions on Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Corruption has ensured the underdevelopment and increasing poverty level in Nigeria. Carden (1976:39) further reveals that corruption leads to a loss of moral authority, weakens efficiency of government operations, increases opportunities for organized crime, encourages police brutality, and leads to insufficient use of resources and benefits the unscrupulous at the cost of the law-abiding. Literature on corruption abounds (Onwujekwe 2020; Nurudeen, & Staniewski 2019; Yagboyaju 2017; Smith 2018). Existing literature has not adequately given a Christian evaluation of corruption in contemporary Nigerian society.

Meanwhile, the church and faith-based communities are busy debating their roles and obligations in the pervasive corruption in Nigeria. Unfortunately, religious

leaders of churches have not adequately used their religious teachings to form the social consciences of their members against corruption. This is because materialism has become the spirit of the age (Eboh 1994:11) and has overshadowed other values. Members of churches and other Christian gatherings are in politics as governors, ministers, local government chairmen, and ambassadors, among others. The members of the Church are supposed to be God's agents for the positive transformation of society (Ehusani 2018:33), but this is not so in Nigeria. In fact, the opposite is the case. This study utilized the phenomenological method of research. The phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl 1970). This article gives an evaluation of corruption in Nigeria, and the role of the Christians in this regard. First, this article looks at corruption in Nigeria. Second, it looks at the causes and impacts of corruption in Nigeria. Third, it gives an Old Testament and Christian evaluation of Corruption and finally gives the responsibility of Christians in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

### **Secular Focused Evaluation of Corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption refers to any act of fraud, bribery, thievery, nepotism, and other deviant behaviour by public and private office holders for their personal gains. Nigeria is blessed with so many natural and human resources. These include petrol, minerals, and fertile soil, but, there is high mismanagement of the resources by those at the helm of affairs which is corruption. Corruption exists in the political, educational, economic, and religious sectors. To begin with, in politics, political office holders are reported to have stolen millions from national coffers. This is political corruption. Political corruption refers to the manipulation of policies, institutions and rules of procedure in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision-makers, who abuse their position to sustain their power, status, and wealth (Lux 2018:10). The revenue derived from the sale of petrol and other mineral resources in Nigeria is not evenly accounted for. Politicians are busy stealing national wealth for their personal profit. Ademoyega (1981:89) lamented:

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds.

In 2018, Nigeria was accorded the poverty capital of the world. This is seen in the increasing hunger and starvation all over Nigeria (Otekunrin et al 2019:1). There was a report of a public servant holder who said he used 220 million naira to cut grass. According to a report, this money was meant for the provision of food,

shelter, and medical care for 2.5 million internationally displaced people in the north east (Anonymous 2016). Furthermore, there are reports of embezzlement of public funds by councillors and local government chairmen. Money meant for the development of their wards is used for their personal benefit. This is made possible by their position of authority. Thus, lack of food, shelter, and clothing has continued to be the fate of the ordinary Nigerian.

In education, there is the manipulation of results by lecturers, sex for grades, and financial inducement for marks by students. The issue of meritocracy has no place in Nigeria's educational milieu. This is one reason why most graduates in Nigeria are unemployable, that is, they cannot speak English, write a sentence or critically analyse issues. Also, there is the sale of employment by some Vice-chancellors of Universities where people not qualified to teach in Universities are employed because they were able to pay the bribe required. Corroborating this obscene practice, Ehusaini (2018:8) said that many heads of institutions place their cronies such as tribesmen, religious adherents, and family members in critical positions which they are not qualified for. Also, people are promoted based on tribal sentiments. Ota (2002:33) lamented that 'patience and hard work no longer became virtues but disabilities as favouritism took priority over merit in the promotion of civil servants and soldiers'. Also worrisome is the fact that people receive salaries when have worked nothing. These kinds of people are known as ghost workers. They are ghosts because they only appear to collect salaries and not to work. Sometimes, names only exist in the payroll with the personality on the staff list either not existing or dead. In most institutions, there are most ghost workers than the real ones and this is an agreement between the heads of such institutions and the policymakers who come to the clearinghouse every month or quarterly or otherwise to share their booty (Ugwu 2002:24).

In the religious sphere, there is the rise of psychological manipulation of adherents with a promise of divine rewards. False prophets engage in alien practices by prophesying falsely to members of their religious congregation. These pastors and priests manipulate their members to do obscene things such as encouraging them to eat and giving them his bath water with the promise of them being delivered from their problems (Olowookere 2020). Members are known to borrow, pledged vows and tithe to their religious leaders with the hope that their present predicament will be ameliorated. In fact, one Mr Kingsley divorced the wife because she took the family car to sow as seed in her church (Anonymous 2016). Also, members are encouraged to contribute in building schools and hospitals which in the end, it is only the rich and elite in the society that can attend the schools or paid their hospital bills. This is religious corruption.

Among security agencies, corruption is something else. On the high way, security men are known to collect a bribe from motorists. Anyone that refuses to bribe on them highway is shot or tagged as 'an armed robber'. In fact, it is alleged that

security personnel such as the police and SARS officers engaged in arm robbery at night with the guns assigned to them from the office. Arm robbers rob freely on the highway because they bribe policemen on the highway. Criminals continue to perform atrocities with impunity because they know they could bribe their way through and go free if arrested by any law enforcement agents (Nzeakor 2002:293). Also, it is reported that members of the Road Safety Corps give licenses to Nigerians who have not learnt how to drive because of the bribe they receive from their solicitors. Ehusani (2018:6) reveals that ‘many Nigerians hold drivers licenses without going to the office of Vehicle Inspection Office testing grounds which puts their lives and lives of other road users at risk’. In the judiciary, corrupt practices are going on. Every administrative arm of the judiciary is the most corrupt because every stop in filing, processing, and assessing an application or in getting a court order executed or obtaining a copy of a ruling involves money (Amujiri 2002:76). In Nigeria, the judiciary and police are neither good enforcer of public or constitutional rules (Lowenberg 1992).

It is important at this juncture to discuss the causes of corruption in Nigeria. First, greed is the motivating factor in corruption practices. Some Nigerians, especially when they occupy a particular position become insatiable in their quest for material benefits. Okolo (1994:32) lucidly observed that a character among Nigerian leaders especially since the oil boom, is

an undeclared but clearly defined craze to amass as much money and wealth as possible with means fair or foul, for it very much matters to him, the size of his bank book, his number of housing estates, the number of transport cars, how many of his relatives, children or otherwise are in high economic position; how much he spends on funerals, weddings, social parties etc.

A Nigerian can steal money meant for an entire state. It is greed that has led to the mismanagement of the economy and the sad state of Nigeria. Odulami (1999:43) adumbrated that it was the mismanagement of the money derived from the oil boom that largely contributed to the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria. A governor who has served his tenure cannot produce one single project he started and completed for the people. Instead, they accumulate billions and trillions of naira in their private accounts which is ever-increasing on a day-to-day basis. Second, lack of integrity has made Nigerians value money at the expense of their names. The perversion of integrity is achieved through bribery, favour, or moral depravity without any iota of shame (Otite 1986). Honesty and sincerity which are core values of the various religions in Nigeria have been thrown to the wind. Nigerians profess religiosity but in their practice, they do the opposite. Nigerians in positions of authority seem not to value their good name which they had, but instead, see positions of authority as times to make more money. Third, the lack of strong institutions has sustained the growth of corruption in Nigeria. Strong

institutions are the bedrock of sustainable governance (Babalola 2021). Adding his thoughts, Abodunde (2020:1) lucidly puts that ‘strong institution is important to checkmate the strongmen when they go rough’. Institutions created to fight against corruption in Nigeria are just kangaroo units created by people in power to fight their enemies. When a leader is exposed, institutions saddled with the responsibility of checkmating the allegation pretend to be carrying out investigation, but in the end, the matter is neglected. This is seen especially if the person who committed the corrupt act is a member of the government in power.

The impact of corruption in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. It has led to increased poverty, unemployment, youth restiveness, drug addiction, increased terrorism, and an increased rate of maternal mortality and morbidity. Nigeria is experiencing extreme poverty caused by the gross abuse of power through corruption by the ruling elites. This is because corruption undermines justice and equilibrium (Kanu 2017). Many Nigerians cannot afford food to eat, house to sleep, and cloth to wear why leaders continue to wallow in extreme wealth, building edifices in Dubai, United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates. Money that would have been used in the building of industries and factories is diverted to private pockets which have led to high level unemployment especially of the youths, making them a menace to the society. Unemployed youths engaged in all forms of restiveness through cultism, kidnapping, drug addiction, and terrorism. It is also important to note that the money meant for the improvement of medical centres and the building of hospitals is pilfered by leaders. This has increased the level of pregnant women and their children dying from labour and pregnancy-related issues. Some social services, which would have alleviated the effects of capitalism, are scarce as national wealth, which would have been invested in social services, finds its way into private pockets (Osakwe 2002:185).

It is important to make point-blank that corruption is the reason why the war against terrorism is being lost. On day to day basis, Nigerians die from terrorism and terrorism-related situations. Boko Haram has been rampaging the north, with little or no resistance. Money budgeted for the buying of ammunition to fight Boko Haram is coerced into private pockets and soldiers are left at the war front with no weapon or inferior weapons to face the heavenly armed Boko Haram terrorists.

### **Old Testament Focused Evaluation of Corruption**

The Old Testament condemns corruption. God made a covenant with his people, Israel. Every corrupt practice is seen as going against God’s covenant. God gave Moses two slates, containing the covenant (Exodus 20:1-17). The covenant has rights and obligations. As part of the obligations, Israelites were encouraged to avoid stealing and coveting things that were not theirs. This is because stealing is an action that is irreparable because it takes away life from the poor (Khan

2020:1). This was an injunction against corrupt practices. If they refuse to keep to these obligations, their relationship with God and protection from God is broken. In Proverbs 14:34, God warned man that sin brings reproach, and problems but righteous acts bring development and exaltation. It warns that anyone or people who engage in corruption will see shame and problems. Amos in his homilies calls for social justice and righteousness. Amos directed his homilies against the exploitative practices and tendencies of the rich against the poor. Amos insisted that God's wrath is on those who oppressed the poor (Amos 5, 8:-5-6). It is the aristocrats of Israel that were prone into engaging in bribery and corruption at the detriment of the poor masses (Amissah 2019:291). The elite sought many trade relations that focused on extracting the biggest economic gains possible, all at the expense of the poor (Ehusani 2018:15).

Prophet Hosea also directed some of his homilies to the exorbitant lifestyles of corrupt people at the expense of the poor. In Hosea 4:4-6 and Hosea 5, the rich in the society do that mind the homelessness of the citizens. They treat the poor with disdain and in an inhumane way. Hosea addresses God's people at a time when their cultic and political institutions have deteriorated through corruption and indifference (Erickson 2020). In Hosea 7:5, they drink so much wine that they become sick. They do not mind whether the poor are surviving or not. Prophet Isaiah also added his lamentation to the betrayal of the poor by the corrupt practices of those in privileged positions. In Isaiah 10, the prophet cursed those who make wicked laws to benefits themselves. He further laid a curse on those who take away the right of the poor and rob the people obscenely and blatantly.

In further refutation of the corrupt practices of those in leadership positions, Ezekiel 34:4 lamented that leaders do not strengthen the weak instead derived joy in a harsh and brutal treatment of the people. In fact, in Ezekiel 17:7, God said that long life belongs to anyone that does not oppressed people, or take what belongs to them and provided for the people to sustain their lives. It will be incomplete to take the homilies of Jeremiah with a pinch of salt. In Jeremiah 22:13, the prophet warned those who build mansions with the resources of the people; and also those who refuse to pay their workers, without giving them wages. In Jeremiah 22:15ff, a plea is made to the privileged ones not to ignore the poor and needy ones amongst them.

### **Christian Focused Evaluation of Corruption in Nigeria**

Concerning politics many Nigerian Christians see politics as a thing of evil. Many Christians regard politics as a dirty game that Christians should avoid (Kantiok 2006:1027). Christianity is a religion of fruit-bearing (Matthew 7:17-20).

However, it is important for Christians intending or occupying leadership positions to understand the characteristics of a good leader. According to Adeyemo (2006:546), a good leader is a servant who waits on others; is a scapegoat who carries others burdens and punishment; is a shepherd who cares for and protects the sheep; is a steward who takes care of others valuables; is a student, scholar, and scribe, who listens to and learns from others; and is a salesperson, who motivates and inspires others. Most church preachers are out to commercialize the church and encourage all kinds of vices in our society (Ugwu 2002:18). They push their members into the various terrible acts they find themselves. They always tell their members to give to God without them mandating them to follow the right step in the process of giving to God. Christian politicians are not rebuked for their corrupt actions instead they are praised when they bring their stolen money as a donation to the church.

The rise of Pentecostalism has escalated corruption in Nigeria. In fact, church leaders have been revealed to engaged in arm robbery and obtaining by trick '419' of properties that belong to members of their church (Ugwu 2002:19). Some Pentecostal pastors teach their members that if they want to escape poverty or problems they should bring vows. This makes members go as far as stealing office money to satisfy the whims and caprices of their spiritual leaders. The teachings of Jesus have been neglected by the church in Nigeria. The teaching of loving one's neighbour is not regarded as a maxim in churches. Instead, people trample on the rights and entitlements of their neighbours, so as to be wealthy and wealthier while their neighbour becomes poorer and poorer. According to Gandhi (1927:224) a good society as to where the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. This is the opposite in Nigeria among Christian leaders in positions of authority. A situation is that the good of the individual is not contained in the good of all.

Pastors and Priests usually like praising and serving as stooges to wealthy politicians in their church. Dairo (2020:244) lamented that the rich members are given accessibility to seeing the pastor with no hindrance while less privileged members are not allowed to communicate with him for once. Dairo (2020:244) further lamented that "These pastors enjoy visiting rich men's houses, being buddies to top personalities in the society, worshipping on the altar of waivers and patronage system, and encouraging theft from the public till by requesting for and accepting hefty donations from public officials". The source of the money donated by these rich men and officeholders is of no use to them. For instance:

About three years ago, the banking sector was exposed as having various levels of corruption. Unfortunately, many of the CEOs involved in the fraud were close friends of many of the key Pentecostal leaders in the country. In the midst of this crisis, some of the pastors were busy organizing

midnight prayer vigils for these bank CEOs. The situation almost became a religious crisis at that time (Oladimeji 2018).

This encourages the elite to continue to steal public money and live a life that will continue to gain the patronage of these pastors and gullible members of the public.

### **The Responsibility of the Christian in the fight against Corruption**

Throughout history, the common people have turned to the church in times of need. The church has followed Christ in recognizing the common people suffering and has given them a voice to speak out against injustice and oppression (Kantiok 2006:1027). Human beings as stewards have the role of managing and preserving the creation for God (Gitau 2000:61) which implies accountability and participation (Johnson 2000:118). Anything anyone is given to do, or any position of authority anyone occupies, is a way of participation in managing and preservation of the creation of God. Christians are supposed to live a life worthy of emulation. Nigerians who claim to worship God, but who at the same time offer and a take bribe, defraud, evade tax and circumvent just laws in numerous ways do not really know God (Ehusani 2018:30). Christianity is not about speaking in tongues or professing a faith that is not evident in character. If Christianity is all about seeking miracles, signs, and wonders that will bring us comfort and pleasure on earth, then it is a fruitless effort and a false proclamation that Christianity is different and better than other religions (Fumilayo 2019:iv). Christians are to note that there is nothing good in amassing wealth on earth that will bring comfort and joy, instead, it will only bring pleasure which is only short-lived and the repercussions are sometimes fatal.

Every Christian has a responsibility to help and counsel others. Counselling is one of the spiritual gifts that is given for building up the church and strengthening individual believers (Collins 2007:35). Church leaders should be counselling their members on the need to avoid stealing from public funds, or engaging in acts that are inimical to societal growth and development. Church leaders should also discipline erring members who are reported and found guilty of embezzling public funds for their personal or group benefits. Jesus who Christians profess to follow came into the world and emptied himself for man. Christians should follow Christ's footsteps by serving humanity. Colyer (2013:6) explained that what is critical to the kenotic servanthood of Christ is his self-emptying. This self-emptying defines the level of humility, obedience, and sacrifice for effective public engagement for others (Castro & Pudhicherry 2016:31–34). Even though, Jesus was God, he did not take advantage of the helplessness of man to exploit man, instead, Christ demonstrated both his true divinity and true humanity because he did not take advantage of his status for his own gains (Gorman 2009:31).



Christians in positions in authority should not take advantage of the resources meant for the people for their personal gains, instead they should emulate Christ by seeking the welfare of others.

Christians should learn to be disciplined, by not allowing the quest for wealth to override their sense of reasoning. Any position they find themselves in, they should show restraint, contentment, and not allow narcissism and hubris to take over them. Taking Christ as a model of emulation who exercised self-limitation, restraint, control and restriction of his self desires (Sarot 1992:185) should be the goal of Christians in positions of authority. Christians should ensure that the privileges of others are given to them. This is self restrain and control.

### **Conclusion**

A Christian-focused evaluation of Corruption in Nigeria is a clarion call on the Christians to emulate Christ by shunning corrupt practices or serving as accomplices. Nigerian church leaders should hearken to this call to challenge the growing corrupt practices in Nigeria. Christians in leadership positions have continued to prove wrong the saying that when the righteous are in power, the people rejoice, when the wicked rule, the people groan (Proverbs 29:2). The suffering in Nigeria will be strongly reduced if more genuine Christians avail themselves to occupy certain leadership positions; and those Christians occupying leadership positions should emulate Christ by seeking more for the welfare of the people rather than their selfish aims and objectives. Christlike leadership is needed in both the church and society in Africa which requires purity of heart, passion for the people, power to serve through prayer, a pioneering spirit, practical wisdom to solve problems and perseverance (Adeyemo 2006:546). As Christians, the word of God has to take root in our lives, and should guide our daily living include our thoughts, actions and dispositions.

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